Christian Community

Volume 7. No. 3 March, 1955

Cincinnati Conference Accents Christian Commitment

Members of the Follow-Up Committee consider next steps to be proposed. Left to right: Rev. John C. Gieser, D.D., Reseda, Calif.; Leonard C. Brecher, Louisville, Ky.; Mrs. Milton C. Lang, Baltimore, Md.; Arthur W. Meyer, Chicago, Ill.; Rev. Karl H. A. Rest, Chairman, Manchester, Mich.; Rev. T. P. Crusius, Philadelphia, Pa.; Rev. Huber F. Klemme, D.D., Cleveland, O.; Rev. Roy J. Eilers, Alden, Iowa.

by F. Nelsen Schlegel

More than a hundred persons, representing committees on Evangelism, Stewardship and Christian Social Action in thirty-four synods, took time at the beginning of February for a significant conference on the meaning of Christian Commitment and Community, meeting for three days in the Sheraton-Gibson Hotel in Cincinnati, Ohio. Joining in the conference were some forty other persons, representing various agencies of the church, including the Board of Christian Education, the Youth Fellowship, the Women's Guild, and the Churchmen's Brotherhood. Still others from the several churches of the Cincinnati area attended some of the sessions. Five fraternal delegates from the Congregational Christian Churches also attended, joining in the group discussions and entering into fellowship with the delegates of the several synods.

The conference was under good leadership from start to finish. Presiding over plenary sessions and group meetings were chairmen of the three Commissions and their executive secretaries.

The keynote address, given by Professor Roger Shinn, Vanderbilt University School of Theology, Nashville, Tennessee, stimulated much discussion, and raised more thought-provoking questions than there was time to answer. Speaking on "The Basis and Scope of Our Christian Concern," Dr. Shinn said that our Christian faith calls us to a ministry of reconciliation, to an understanding of life and history, and to a deep sense of confidence in God, even when our most faithful efforts do not produce visible results. Recalling Sir Edward Grey's famous statement, in 1914, to the effect that "the lights are going out all over Europe," Dr. Shinn said, "The times have brought greater disasters and more portentous threats than Sir Edward could imagine. Plenty of lights have gone out; we can expect more to flicker or be extinguished. But

(Continued on Page 3, Col. 3)

What Follows the Cincinnati Conference?

The Follow-Up Committee proposed to the conference the acceptance of a modified *Manual of Procedures* which can be of assistance in a continuing emphasis upon Christian Commitment and Christian Community. General Council was requested to use its efforts in promoting the emphasis through all the synods of the church during the coming year.

A time-table like the following may be useful in an every-parish program focussing on the theme:

A. STARTING NOW — pastors obtain from any of the three commissions (Evangelism, Stewardship, Christian Social Action) copies of the *Manual of Procedures.*

B. May-June, 1955—the Church Cabinet, under the pastor's guidance studies the reports of the Cincinnati conference, and arranges for promotion of the emphasis within the local parish.

C. July-August, 1955—Laymen, women, youth leaders think of Christian Commitment and Christian Community in summer camps and conferences.

D. Early September—a church retreat or planning conference is held, perhaps on a Sunday afternoon and evening. Leaders in all departments of the church attend. Plans are made to make the emphasis reach all members of the church. Visitors are enlisted for step E.

E. Mid-September to October 1—an Every Member Visitation takes place, aiming at reaching every member with a friendly invitation to take part in the church-wide emphasis.

(Continued on Page 4, Col. 2 and 3)

GROUP CONFERENCES REPORT ON CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

Delegates to the Cincinnati conference were given opportunity to meet in each of three work groups, there to wrestle with six themes which had been presented for consideration. We offer here a digest of the reports which came out of the three work groups, which, for convenience, were named A, B, and C. Leaders of the three group conferences were officers of the three Commissions, and consultants.

Group A

Subjects considered in Group A were: "The Christian Commitment and Its Scope," and "The Mission of the Church to Those Outside." Here are the conclusions drawn:

Christian Commitment is basic to the Christian life, and to the whole work of the Church. It is man's response to the love of God, and to the call of Jesus Christ. It involves many things, such as faith, the possession of the mind of Christ, conviction, love and concern for people, vicarious service, and self-denial. However, it is basically expressed in an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, taking him as the supreme example of our life and his teachings as the standard for our living.

The lack of complete commitment on the part of confessing Christians is the greatest problem, or weakness, in the church today. To meet this problem, Christian commitment: a) needs to become more meaningful in our system of confirmation; b) needs to become more intelligent through preparatory membership classes; c) needs to recapture more of warmth and emotion, so that it will express itself in joy and urgency; d) should be a growing experience, a deepening process, through prayer groups, Bible study groups and kindred experiences.

If the Church truly believes that Christ is the hope of the world, then every pastor, and every Christian needs to ask himself, "Am I bearing a witness for Jesus Christ?" Too often the church is beset with a conspiracy of silence: followers of Christ remaining dumb, not bearing their witness.

Since the world cannot be reached by waiting for it to come to the Church, Group A came to these conclusions:

a) The goal of evangelism is to make committed Christians of all who are now church members;

b) Every church must keep alive a spiritual responsibility list, and form groups that will show a Christian concern for people on that list;

c) Lay visitation is the Twentieth Century method, proven and tested as highly successful, to augment the preaching and teaching agency for winning new people to Christ;

d) Every minister needs to train laymen to bear witness for Jesus Christ, so that they may confront others with the challenge of Jesus;

e) Evangelism, or bearing witness, needs to be restored to Christian thinking, so as to make it a requirement for church membership.

Group B

Group B concerned itself with "Christian Living in Church and Home," and "The Stewardship of All of Life." Findings were put in the form of a *Credo,* which reads as follows:

"Christian Stewardship has two foci. On the one hand there is the recognition that God has committed unto us his gospel. We are the stewards of the mysteries of God. The Sovereign Being has entrusted to us the task of making known his will and way among men.

"On the other hand, there is the recognition that out of our gratitude for God's goodness, we commit ourselves—our total life—to him, to love him, to serve him, to fulfill the high purpose for which he has created us.

"Since Stewardship involves personal commitment, we feel the most effective way of giving expression to it is through the first person. Thus each of us can say: Out of gratitude for all he has given to me, I gladly offer to him my life, my all.

"Thus Stewardship is more than the giving of money, although it is that. It is more than the giving of time, although it involves that too. It is more than the giving of my talents, although it involves that. It is the giving of myself —the offering up of my total self to him.

"This means that in all the relationships of life, I shall seek to give a good account of my stewardship. In the home, I shall, along with the other members of my family, worship him. I shall share in the closeness of the family council my concerns, my hopes, my wisdom, my experience, so that together we may fulfill the purpose God has for us. I shall so organize my life that the way I earn my money and the way I use my money shall contribute to the advancement of God's will and Kingdom among men.

"It means that in the church I shall seek to be faithful to the responsibilities that I carry as a member of the body of Christ. I shall attend church regularly. I shall consecrate my talents to God's service at the place where I can make the fullest possible contribution to his Kingdom. I shall give of my money directly, generously, cheerfully, proportionately, as God has prospered me.

"All this I shall do, not out of any compulsion, save the compulsion of my gratitude to God for all he has done for me.

"Christian Stewardship is related to both commitment and to community. The Steward recognizes that God has committed the Gospel to him. He, in turn, is committed to giving a faithful account of his stewardship. And in so doing, he helps to establish a Christian community among men."

Group C

Group C also examined two themes. It was agreed that the Church is concerned about "The *Social Expression* of our Faith." For the church has the direct responsibility of endeavoring to see, and, to help its members to see, economic and political problems in the light of Christian principles. To arrive at responsible judgments, information both as to the Christian principles that apply, and accurate information in the particular area to which consideration is being given, are needed. A committee on Christian Social Action could give Christian action proper status as an area of concern in the life of a congregation, and to provide opportunities for free discussion.

Among points raised in Group C were these: a) The question is not whether Christians shall engage in social action, for by the very nature of our life every person does; the real question is whether our part in social action will be Christion; b) The church has need for a continual reexamination of her witness and the relevance of that witness to the society in which she lives; c) The church has responsibility in such urgent problems as juvenile delinquency, world peace, the family, race relations, and labor-management relations; d) Christian Social Action is the concern of the whole congregation, not simply of the minister.

But what about "Working Toward a Responsible Society?" Group C borrowed the phrase "a responsible society" from the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches, where the

(Continued on Page 3, Col. 2)

Commission Adopts Statement on Formosa

At the winter meeting of the Commission on Christian Social Action, held in Cincinnati, February 3 and 4, much thought went into planning for the Commission's report to appear in the Blue Book which is presented annually to the synods prior to their Spring meetings. Highlighting this report are several resolutions on international affairs which will be presented in some detail in the April issue of CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

Included in the report to the synods is the following statement on Formosa, which was sent to the President of the United States, to the Secretary of State and to several other high government officials:

"The Formosa situation poses a dilemma. In dealing with this situation we are concerned both to maintain the freedom of free nations and defend our own freedom. We must also endeavor to preserve peace because we know that to touch off a global war would bring great destruction and suffering, perhaps even total destruction for the human race. We commend the President of the United States for his attitude and handling of dangerous situations in which he has combined firmness with restraint. We would encourage the Department of State to use the channels of the United Nations for a peaceful settlement of Formosa with due respect for the rights of the people of that island.

"We pray that God may give our leaders wisdom in their decisions, that they may be guided not only by the best interests of our own nation, but also by the best interests of all men, and that they may constantly seek Divine aid."

The report to the synods asks for special attention to four emphases which, it is hoped, will be given much thoughtful study by pastors and congregations throughout the coming year. These four emphases are:

1. Post Evanston study and action.
2. The Christian and His Daily Work.
3. Race Relations.
4. Christian Commitment and Christian Community.

It goes without saying that Churches everywhere will want to study the many documents which came out of the second assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Evanston last summer. It is significant that four of the six sections among which the delegates at Evanston were distributed dealt with the concerns of Christian social action—the responsible society, international affairs, inter-group relations, and the layman in his vocation. All of these concerns are related to the four emphases mentioned above.

1955 City Workshop Reminder

Place—Cincinnati, Ohio

Time—April 18-22, 1955

Registration fee—$25 from official synodical delegates

Further information may be had from Dr. Ralph S. Weiler, 1505 Race Street, Philadelphia 2, Pa.

Group Conferences Report

(Continued from Page 2, Col. 3)

term was used to designate the kind of social structure for which Christians ought to work. A responsible society involves both large and small groups, and means responsible living in the sight of God with regard to our relations to others.

The most fundamental of the groups within society is the family. Members of a family must continually endeavor to guide their relations and responsibilities toward one another in the light of God's will as it is revealed in his word.

But individuals also belong to other groups within society. They may be members of labor unions, associations of manufacturers, political parties; they are citizens of a nation. In all of these relationships they must continually endeavor to govern their decisions and their actions as children of God, and as members of a society which is responsible to God. In forming opinions and in giving or withholding support on issues that arise in society and in government, they will not act simply from the motive of self-interest, but with a concern for the welfare of all men in the sight of God.

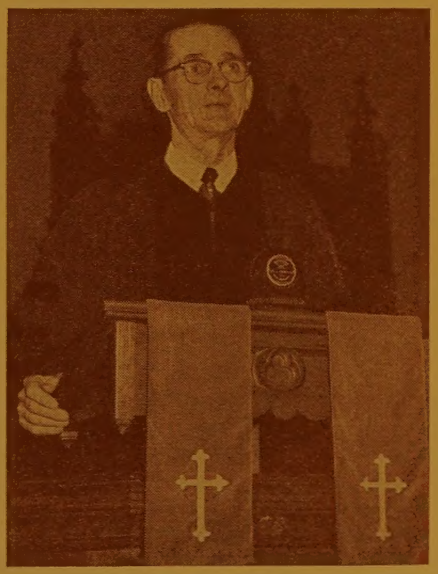
With this in mind, said Group C, the Church must recognize her obligations to order her own life as a responsible society. Since the Church is concerned with people it is also concerned with whatever thwarts, hinders or affects the good health and the lives of people, and the development of the community. On occasion the church needs to speak a prophetic word; on others it needs to work for the elimination of evils. In conflict situations it may serve as the neutral party in negotiations looking to the settlement of issues.

Cincinnati Conference

(Continued from Page 1, Col. 3)

the Light of the World yet shines. We of the church are called to let it stream into our lives, to hold it aloft. To do so is to be evangelists, to be stewards, to be agents of God in society."

Two conference leaders, Dr. Berlyn V. Farris, of the Joint Department on Evangelism of the National Council of Churches, and the Reverend Charles Templeton, of the Division of Evangelism of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., were kept away by illness. Their places were well taken, however, by Dr. H. H. McConnell, Associate Secretary to Dr. Farris in the National Council, and the Reverend John L. Schmidt, pastor of Frieden's Evangelical and Reformed Church in St. Louis. Mr. Schmidt's sermon at the public service



Rev. John L. Schmidt in pulpit at Philippus Church.

of worship in Philippus Church was a strong challenge to all who would consider what is involved in relating Christian Commitment to Community.

Three of the four devotional services which brought the delegates together for group worship were ably led by the Reverend Mr. Schmidt. The Reverend Harold Wilke, of Crystal Lake, Illinois, also spoke at one of these devotional services.

Delegates were given opportunity to work together in the development of aids for a continuing emphasis on the conference theme throughout the coming year. All delegates spent time in three working groups to deal with six subjects related to the general theme. Serving as resource leaders in the three

(Continued on Page 4, Col. 1)

Christian Community

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(Continued from Page 3, Col 3)

groups were Dr. H. H. McConnell; Dr. Clarence Stoughton, president of Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio; and the Reverend Walter S. Press, pastor of Bethlehem Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Digests of the reports of these group conferences are given on page 2 of this issue of *Christian Community*.

The final day was given to plenary sessions, at which findings of the several group meetings were discussed, and the proposals of the follow-up committee were modified and then adopted. It is hoped that churches in the several synods will call upon conference delegates for assistance in thinking about the coming denominational emphasis on Christian Commitment and Christian Community which had its beginning at the Cincinnati meetings.

A local Cincinnati committee, led by Dr. Ben M. Herbster and the Reverend Harry G. Schairbaum, did a wonderful job in making arrangements for entertainment of the conference in Cincinnati.

What About UMT?

On June 30, 1955, the Universal Military Training and Selective Service Act of 1951 expires. At this writing Congress is rushing through an act to extend selective service for four more years. A modified form of UMT is also being discussed. *Arguments for* the new reserve plan are given briefly in a pamphlet, *Proposed National Reserve Plan,* which is available from the Secretary of Defense, Code NRP, The Pentagon, Washington 25, D. C. *The arguments against* this plan and other forms of compulsory military service have been set forth in a special issue, No. 135, of the *Washington Newsletter* of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, 104 C Street, N.E., Washington 2, D. C.

We suggest that you obtain both documents.

What Follows the Cincinnati Conference?

(Continued from Page 1, Col. 1)

F. October, 1955—The Sunday services, and week day activities are so planned as to highlight the five proposed commitment themes and the related study themes:

2—World Communion—"Our Commitment to Christ"
Suggested Study Theme—"Keeping Our Commitment Alive"

9—National Mission Sunday—"Reaching the Whole Community"
Suggested Study Theme—"Widening the Circle of the Committed"

16—Men's Sunday—"Life's Real Purpose"
Suggested Study Theme — "The Expression of our Commitment Through Giving"

23—World Order Sunday — "Our Christian Responsibility for World Community" Suggested Study Theme—"Paths to World Community"

30—Reformation Sunday—"The Christian's Call"
Suggested Study Theme—"The Christian and His Daily Work"

G. November, 1955—May, 1956—Follow-up on suggestions growing out of the emphasis.

To Pastors and Local Social Action Chairmen:

This issue of CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY is intended to stimulate interest in the reports of the Cincinnati Conference on Christian Commitment and Christian Community. We hope it will lead to much discussion of this theme, and that this cooperative approach to a deeper realization of our Christian discipleship may prove of profound spiritual value to the whole church.

Call to Commitment to Christian Living

(Adopted by the Cincinnati Conference on February 3)

We who are called into the service of Jesus Christ are humbled and lifted up by the ministry of reconcilation which is committed to us. We are humbled because we know not only our limitations, but also our proneness to neglect, distort, and to pervert the ministry to which every Christian is called. We are lifted up because we know the goodness and power of God to transform lives, to create fellowship, and to accomplish his purpose in us and through us.

This present time confronts us with the necessity both to understand more clearly and to embody more fully the nature and scope of our commitment. To a generation threatened with meaninglessness, we affirm that the meaning of life is found in Christ. To a generation brought to despair by the fear of self-destruction, we affirm that we have hope in Christ. To a generation obsessed with anxiety and insecurity, we affirm that our security is in the love of God in Christ. To a generation which finds itself desperately seeking for a way to overcome the isolation of persons and to find a way to fellowship, we affirm that the center of unity and community is found in Christ.

Because the ministry of reconciliation has been committed to us, we are constrained to ask with utmost seriousness whether we are totally committed. We pray for such a working of the Spirit of God in us and our fellow-Christians that our dedication to Jesus Christ may be ever more complete. We are constrained to examine our community life as Christian people, and to pray that we may be given wisdom, power, and sensitivity, so that the community of Christian people becomes more expressive of the nature of the Body of Christ. We are constrained to judge the nature of our society in the light of God's purpose, and to consecrate ourselves to the service of Christ, and so to the service of our fellow men.

Join with us in renewed and total commitment to Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Join with us in a deeper concern for those who have not yet committed themselves to Jesus Christ. Join with us in a continuing endeavor to make our group living conform to the nature of the living Body of Christ. Join with us in a constant witness to God's order for our common life.

Our confidence is not in what we can do, but in what God can do through us. Our trust is not in our strength, but in the sufficiency of Christ. Our hope is not in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ — crucified, risen, and crowned Lord of all. With God all things are possible.